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Corridor Gothic

Roger Luckhurst

Abstract:

This essay investigates the role of the corridor in Gothic fiction and horror film from the late eighteenth century to the present day. It seeks to establish this transitional space as a crucial locus, by tracing the rise of the corridor as a distinct mode of architectural distribution in domestic and public buildings since the 18th century. The essay tracks pivotal appearances of the corridor in fiction and film, and in the final phase argues that it has become associated with a specific emotional tenor, less to do with amplified fear and horror and more with emotions of *Angst* or dread.

Keywords:

Architecture and the Gothic, Spatial Form, Domestic and Public Space, Horror, Dread, Affect theory, the Uncanny.

The Gothic has always temporalized its spaces, situating its obsessions with inheritance and legacy in highly symbolic locales. The precise spatial locations where the Gothic plays out its romances have been crucial to map both geographically and psychically. Manuel Aguirre suggests that the genre:

manifests itself in haunted buildings, in labyrinths, and prisons,
catacombs and caves; in borders and frontiers, thresholds and walls; in

the terror of the shuttered room and the protection of the magic circle; in the promise and dread of the closed door ... The world is defined in horror literature as *space* and, furthermore, as *closed space*.¹

Eino Railo's *The Haunted Castle* (1927), from the earliest beginnings of the study of 'horror romanticism', emphasized the importance of brooding locales and atmospheric settings. Terry Castle suggested that the first wave of Gothic castles, labyrinths and dungeons provided mobile metaphors for an emergent discourse of depth psychology in the eighteenth century.² Stephen King extended the haunted house to a wider category of the 'Bad Place.'³ The haunted house – the 'bad' or 'dark' place of 'unregulated and irrational supplements' – has thus been routinely grasped either through the striated topography of psychoanalysis or as emblematic of the psychic dissociations of the trauma paradigm.⁴ The vertical layers of the domestic house – basement, staircase, attic – map the topography of the psyche. If, as Siegfried Kracauer said, 'spatial images are the dreams of society', then the nightmares of Gothic spaces promise similar allegorical richness.⁵

This essay is an attempt to push beyond the generalized topography of psychic projection of built space. It has been prompted by trying to isolate the resonances of a particular, pervasive space in the Gothic: the corridor. The corridor is everywhere in Gothic fiction and has become particularly pervasive in contemporary horror film. As Eino Railo observes, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* is full of 'bewildering vaulted passages', while in Ann Radcliffe's fiction 'we pace the rooms and corridors, whose long perspectives display a simple

nobility of line' then enter 'passages, which are extremely numerous, winding and narrow, so that they form a veritable labyrinth.'⁶ These *Udolpho* spaces have never gone away, but have been renewed in horror film, most famously in the hotel corridor scenes Stanley Kubrick's version of *The Shining* (1979).

It might seem quixotic to focus on the corridor. Stephan Trüby acknowledges that the corridor has a 'poor standing in our cultural imaginary,' although Kate Marshall, in a recent study of American fiction, has argued for the importance of understanding an emergent 'corridic modernity' dominated by networks and passages of mediation.⁷ This essay proposes that paying attention to such apparently overlooked spaces can achieve two critical tasks: first, to refine the taxonomy of Gothic spaces as they modulate through modernity; and, relatedly, to discriminate more precisely the spectrum of affect associated with particular locales.

Cunning Passages, Contrived Corridors

'The history of the corridor,' architectural writer Robin Evans complained in 1978, 'has yet to be written.'⁸ Only much later have Stephan Trüby and Mark Jarzombek responded to this challenge, but even so the corridor remains an under-examined, transitional non-space between places.⁹ This is because corridors are not regarded as architecture but as *infrastructure*, one of the underpinning service elements of the built environment that are too big, or buried, or boring, to deserve comment. Infrastructure 'seldom sustains mindful attention, manifesting instead the stuff of an unremarked substrate simply

servicing the basics of everyday life.¹⁰ The corridor is an unregarded and unloved un-architecture.

It is the very modernity of the corridor that leaves it overlooked. Corridor derives from the Latin verb *currere*, to run, and shares the same root as *courier*, the person who runs with messages. Initially, the structure of a corridor referred to the path built around the inside of Italian town fortifications to ease communication during military engagement. By the fifteenth century, it moved inside Italian palazzos as the route built for messengers that bypassed the clutter of rooms. These were *transversal* structures, designed for speed of communication, their grandeur reflecting the importance of the figure awaiting his courier. This is how it was first transposed into the grand houses of England, most recognisably in John Vanbrugh's designs for Castle Howard (1698) and Blenheim Palace (built between 1705-22).

Yet the corridor remained a rare structure (and even rarer word in English) into the early nineteenth century, when public buildings began to be structured around the *tangential* corridor, designed to organize rooms off a central spine. It is only from around the 1820s that the word 'corridor' is used in English with any regularity, older terms like passage or gallery used interchangeably until the turn of the twentieth century.

In the late-eighteenth century, corridors began to appear in designs for collective housing for workers suggested by utopians like Charles Fourier and Robert Owen, or in the prison architecture that followed the design of the radial

'corridor' wings of the Model Prison at Pentonville (1842), or in the asylum buildings that followed the innovative York Retreat (1796), which for the first time had individual rooms for patients built along what were called 'galleries'.¹¹ Hospitals too went through a major reform of design in the 1860s and 1870s, starting to use a spine of long 'link' corridors, with separate 'pavilion' wards coming off it in order to isolate them and allow the free flow of air, in accord with Florence Nightingale's recommendations. When St Thomas's in London was rebuilt in 1868, it had a nine hundred feet long corridor.¹²

Institutional histories place a different emphasis on the role of the corridor in the design. Alongside reformist institutions were out-and-out utopian visions.

Charles Fourier dreamt of dissolving all traditional familial and social structures by designing a people's palace he called a 'phalansterie' or phalanx. The phalanx was designed for 1620 people to live a life of unalienated labour and new amorous relationships. It was imagined around a 'street gallery': 'All the portions of the central edifice can be traversed by means of a wide gallery which runs along ... the whole building,' Fourier explained.¹³ Partial realizations of the idea of the phalanx were made by the socialist Robert Owen and various groups in the American Associationist movement of the 1840s.¹⁴

In contrast, the use of the corridor in new reformatory prisons from the 1780s was built on the principle of *separation*. The penitentiary aimed to reform the soul by isolating miscreants from each other, distributing them along ribbons of single cells on closely surveilled galleries to prevent the 'contagion' of criminality and to force penitent reflection in conditions of unrelenting solitary

confinement.¹⁵ Henry Mayhew's *The Criminal Prisons of London* (1862) carried an illustration of the pristine iron and glass rationalism of Pentonville's tiered corridor structures, light and clean and ordered.

The reformed asylum differentiated the criminal from the insane. This was a revolution in the treatment of mental affliction, which had previously hurled the mad into undifferentiated confinement: Bedlam. The York Retreat was specially built to take away locks on doors and bars on windows and distribute patients along rational corridors in separate male and female wings, the only other separation being the removal of the violently insane to the farthest edges of the structure. This 'corridor-plan' asylum was refined and expanded from the 1850s by the leading American builder of asylums, Thomas Kirkbride. At the centre of Kirkbride's building was the administrative core and superintendent's office, the locus of rationality. Spread out along the wings, separated by gender, were wards that were categorised by gradations of insanity, ending at the far edges with the violent and incurable cases. This moral treatment was reinforced by the understanding that conformity to social norms was rewarded by movement along the corridor, ever closer to the centre – and so to the exit. Kirkbride's plan made for elongated, corridic asylums, which became the model for every state asylum built in America between the 1850s and 1880s, when the optimism that his design engineered mental health ebbed away.¹⁶ Asylum ruins remain an integral part of the contemporary Gothic imaginary, as Martin Scorsese's film *Shutter Island* (2010) or TV series *American Horror Story: Asylum* (2012-13) suggest.

The emergence of the corridor in the private house had a different purpose again. A major shift started in the construction of houses for the wealthy in the early nineteenth century, which paid new attention to the internal circulation provided by corridor plans.¹⁷ This domestic corridor, however, was in the service of a new kind of domestic privacy, separating public state apartments from private family rooms, men from women, children from adults, and the family from its servants.

The role of the corridor in producing social differentiation was emphasized throughout the key architectural study of the domestic house in the nineteenth century, *The English Gentleman's House* by Robert Kerr (1864). Kerr's history of the English house, and his recommendations for design to a newly emergent middle-class, obsessively concern the importance of privacy, segregation and separation. In Kerr's book, the device for differentiation is nearly always the corridor. 'The privacy of Corridors and Passages becomes a problem; and the lines of traffic of the servants and family respectively have to be kept clear of each other at certain recognised points', he worried. 'The idea which underlies all is simply this,' Kerr admitted: 'each class is entitled to shut its door upon the other, and be alone.'¹⁸ Kerr's study is, as Chase and Levenson observe, a textbook of the 'emotional investments and spatial anxieties' of the Victorian middle-classes, without remarking that this is principally a corridic anxiety, that contradictory hinge-space that at once separates but necessarily *joins* the social classes.¹⁹

Georges Perec's book, *Species of Spaces*, is devoted to those everyday spaces that we tend to ignore because they have been increasingly differentiated, 'broken up and diversified'. The 'corridors of the Paris Métro' are one of his first examples, recurring repeatedly in his brief 'Foreword'. These spaces suggest 'nothingness, the impalpable, the virtually immature' and 'whose mutism is so prolonged that it ends by triggering off something akin to fear.'²⁰ Although he says nothing further about corridors, his last phrase is telling: why might a space like the corridor provoke 'something *akin* to fear'?

Corridor Gothic

The Gothic emerges in the same century as the corridor becomes a device for circulation; hence, these kinds of architectural space have been integral to Gothic romance from the beginning. Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1765) inaugurates the Medieval castle as a space whose volumes are confounded by dream-logic, where picture galleries have disturbingly lively portraits and the foundations are riddled with secret passageways and escape tunnels that subvert the patriarch's authority. Passed off as a sixteenth century document, Walpole is entirely correct, though, to avoid the modernity of a term like 'corridor' in *Otranto*, instead placing spectres in the gallery and flights from tyranny through tunnels.

It is Radcliffe's resolutely modern novels that show the importance of discriminating between ancient and modern architectural spaces. In *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), the early menace and suspense is located in the ruined Gothic abbey and its 'winding passages', an incoherent space that repeats the paths of the forest beyond that can only 'perplex, with its labyrinths.' These

soon enter the heroine's nightmares, where she is first 'bewildered in some winding passages of the abbey; that it was almost dark, and that she wandered about a considerable time without being to find a door.'²¹ Adeline escapes the multiple menaces of the abbey, including a whole subterranean network of passages, tunnels and dungeons below ground, and her return to social order and propriety is marked by her entry to the light-filled chateau of La Luc and its open prospect onto magnificent scenery that might be sublime but can be contained within the gaze rather than overwhelming it with the terrors of the unbounded imagination. 'The chateau was not large, but it was convenient, and was characterised by an air of elegant simplicity and good order.'²² The precise description of the 'small hall' with its clear distribution of rational spaces to the left and right, the distinction of family parlour and study, suggest that Adeline has been released from superstitious disorder and ushered into enlightened modernity. She has moved from labyrinthine and confounding passages to the logical proportions and distributions of the modern domestic corridor.

The same contrast occurs in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). Here the castle is internally divided between the incoherent accumulations of its ancient past and more modern sections that provide some kind of relief from tortuous spatial terrors. Emily's extended journey at night through Montoni's castle moves through vaulted galleries, up spiral staircases, down into ruined chapel crypts and into twisting passages 'the walls of which were dropping with unwholesome dews'.²³ These all build towards her famous encounter with the 'terrible spectacle' in a 'recess of the chamber' that is withheld from the reader.²⁴ Again, the eventual moral contrast is with the modest and rational order of the chateau

at La Vallée where Emily will finally settle, freed of the Medieval maze of the disordered imagination.

Radcliffe's spatial obsession is specifically mocked by Jane Austen in Catherine Morland's disappointed expectation in *Northanger Abbey* (1817), where she fails to be conducted along any 'gloomy passages' or 'a secret subterraneous communication' when she visits the abbey.²⁵ Instead, she is bewildered to find eighteenth century furniture of 'modern taste' and windows with glass 'so large, so clear, so light!' that no sublime obscurity is going to lift her into a state of Radcliffean terror. The older part of *Northanger*, built around a re-modelled cloister, can merely offer her the tortured double negative of 'occasional passages, not wholly unintricate.'²⁶

The Gothic sensibility thrived on gloomy piles of 'excessive antiquity' long into the nineteenth century. Poe's *House of Usher* sits precariously above the family vaults, 'lying, at great depth, immediately beneath the portion of the building in which was my own sleeping apartment.'²⁷ The domestic spaces are much more overtly middle class and domesticated in *Jane Eyre*, where the 'gallery' that houses the bedrooms at Thornfield Hall conceals a secret above it in 'the dark, low corridor of the fateful third storey' of the servants' quarters, where Bertha Mason is hidden and from where she descends to mount her terrorist attacks on Rochester and Jane below.²⁸ There is a clear distinction made between the usage of gallery and the servant's corridor in this scene. Once the corridor became a common feature of the domestic house by the mid-nineteenth century, it began to feature in a host of 'haunted corridor' stories in the newspapers, with columns

that hovered uncertainly between reportage, urban folk-lore and tall tale. In a typical example, the *Kentish Gazette* carried eyewitness accounts of a seemingly well-known haunting in Somerset: 'The circumstance was, that on almost every night, at twelve o'clock, something that was invisible entered a certain corridor at one end, and passed out at the other.'²⁹

The later golden age of the ghost story offers sequences in a number of famous tales that hinge on encounters in corridor spaces. In Henry James's 'The Jolly Corner', Spencer Brydon returns to New York to take possession of the mansion he has inherited, only to spend his nights traversing the empty hallways, connecting rooms and corridors with the perverse expectation that 'he might have been met by some strange figure, some unexpected occupant at a turn of one of the dim passages of an empty house.'³⁰ This enigmatic pursuit carries on through 'gaping rooms and sounding passages',³¹ Brydon corners the double in what seems to be an *enfilade* of connecting rooms that 'gave all three upon a common corridor as well, but there was a fourth, beyond them, without issue save through the preceding' – a dead-end.³² He is suddenly unwilling to confront the figure behind the door, sinking into what he calls 'vague anguish' and 'with all his resolution, or more exactly with all his dread, he did stop short.'³³ Brydon turns tail and tries to escape the building, only to encounter a deformed spectral other at the bottom of the stairs. He swoons in denial, coming back to consciousness at 'the uttermost end of an interminable grey passage', that 'dark other end of his tunnel.'³⁴

James's phrases are exquisitely balanced between the literal and the figurative, the terrain at once an allegorical encounter with a suppressed part of the self, but also an entirely literal traversal of the house, which constantly emphasizes doorways, thresholds, corridors and passages. No wonder one important study of James is titled *The Crooked Corridor*, borrowing James's own metaphor of never going straight at the thing in a novel, but always including an 'ante-chamber or two and the crooked corridor before [the reader] is in the Presence.'³⁵

Other examples from the same era might include W. W. Jacobs's 'The Monkey's Paw', in which the bereaved parents cower in fear in their hall passageway as their son, no longer quite dead, hammers on the outer door. In M. R. James's 'Number 13', a phantom room appears in a hotel passageway and seems to superimpose itself across the re-structured rooms meant to erase it. Quite what happens at the end of the passage in Rudyard Kipling's 'At the End of the Passage' is so terrifying that the reader is held aloof from it and left only with puzzle pieces about what precisely was seen. Meanwhile, monstrous hybrid creatures slither along the corridors outside interconnected rooms of the only hotel in town in H. P. Lovecraft's horror story 'Shadow over Innsmouth'. The diffident English writer of strange tales Robert Aickman carried this spatial obsession into the post-war era. In 'The Unsettled Dust' there are heaps of the stuff that somehow can't be swept from the rooms and passages of Clamber Court, just taken over by the Historic Structures Fund from its sullen, bankrupt heirs. Dust is what can't be erased in the shift from aristocratic hierarchy to post-war bureaucracy. The hapless protagonist in Aickman's 'The Hospice', marooned

in this perplexing guest house overnight, notes that ‘the corridors were down to half-illumination ... and distinctly sinister’. This Kafkaesque place is another of Aickman’s smothering welfarist institutions.’³⁶

In contemporary fiction, three novels elevate the corridor to a principal locus of modern hauntedness. Mark Danielewski’s *The House of Leaves* (2000) wraps meta-fictional layers around the tale of a mysterious corridor that opens inside the Navidson House. It starts as an anomaly of mismatched internal and external measurements before opening into a seventy feet long cold, featureless corridor with ominous branches ‘sliding on and on, spawning one space after another, a constant stream of corridors and walls’, before then unspooling into a vast, unmappable space, measured in one of the last explorations as over 130 miles long.³⁷ This ‘strange spatial violation’ remains mutely and maddeningly uninterpretable, a ‘hallway [that] offers no answers.’³⁸ What unnerves the reader is not the ancient mythology of the minotaur and the labyrinth, which is teasingly evoked throughout, but the steadfast blandness of these corridor spaces. They contain nothing but their own empty modernity.

In Will Wiles’s *The Way Inn* (2014) a professional conference-goer travels the globe moving from one anonymous hotel to another, offering expert descriptions of generic hotel décor: ‘A small sofa sat in the corridor near the lift, one of those baffling gestures towards domesticity made by hotels. It was not there to be sat in – it was there to make the corridor appear furnished, an insurance policy against bleakness and emptiness.’³⁹ In a key section, the protagonist leaves the security of his room and decides to turn down corridors against the usual

shortest route to the elevators. 'I kept moving, left, right, right again, trying to randomise my route ... to defy any logical path and experience the building naturally, like a forest, without desire, without rational choices.'⁴⁰ To his bewilderment, the corridors seem to extend infinitely, and when he encounters the same room numbers he is sure that he has not looped back because this is a subtly different corridor. Indeed, this is 'not a single corridor, a corridor with branches', but a space that is infinite: 'The hotel went on forever.'⁴¹

Jeff VanderMeer's Southern Reach trilogy, *Annihilation*, *Authority* and *Acceptance* (all 2014), keeps returning to the space of the institutional corridor, the instrumental rationality of a secret intelligence facility perverted by some contaminating logic of alien alterity that leaks out of the mysterious Area X that has appeared in Florida and defies any logical causality or spatial fixity. *Authority* tracks how the administered world of the deep state has been invaded by irrational eruptions, even in its most apparently rational volumes. All of these stories return to the 'obscene and recessive spaces' that Joshua Comaroff and Ong Ker-Shing suggest in *Horror in Architecture* lurk behind the apparently functionalist spaces of rational design.⁴²

The Corridor Shot

Aside from fiction, the corridor is even more important in the visual economy of the horror film, where the corridor shot has become a stock trope since at least the claustrophobic expressionist spaces of *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920). It is significant, for example, that the American psychologist John Holden in *Night of the Demon* (1957) – Jacques Tourneur's adaptation of M. R. James's 'Casting of

Runes' – has a first inkling of the conjured demon in an otherwise anonymous hotel corridor, just as he reaches for the keyhole. It is a pre-modern invocation in a quintessentially modern space, but also the sudden distorted expansion of that corridor space behind Holden reveals the isolated vulnerability of the psychologist's sceptical rationalism against supernatural threat.

Shot through classic wide angle, shallow focal length, the constrained space of the corridor distorts and expands volumes, disorienting the viewer: 'the edge of the frame becomes skewed, their lines slanting. Empty space within the image is expanded. Distances look greater than they would to the human eye.'⁴³ This has been used to great effect in the corridors of Hill House in *The Haunting* (1963) or *The Legend of Hell House* (1973), both of which shoot their corridors almost entirely in distorted wide angle.

The corridor is exploited in horror film because as the camera advances through its restrictive space, it multiplies the anticipatory fear from the off-screen space of the doorways and voids that it passes. Dario Argento's *Suspria* (1977) uses odd pauses and camera drifts from unmotivated points of view in the highly stylized corridors and labyrinths of secret passageways in the Gothic space of the dance academy to generate suspense. At the operatic finale, the curve of the hidden corridor, lined with occult invocations that unwind as the camera steadily advances, reveals the coven of witches beyond.

The length of the corridor, whether in straight vista or in angled turns, allows things to advance or recede ominously from the viewer. The constrictive space

can contain a threat, turning the corridor into a gauntlet, as has been common in zombie horde films from Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) to the endless corridors of various Umbrella Corporation installations in the *Resident Evil* franchise. Or the corridor space itself can become distended, redoubling its role as transition or portal, as in *Poltergeist* (1982), where the domestic corridor stretches and severs connection. More recently, the space of the corridor itself can become the focus of fear, as in an influential film like *Paranormal Activity* (2007), where a considerable portion of screen time is spent waiting for something to emerge from the black void of the landing beyond the half-open bedroom door. In Mike Flanagan's *Absentia* (2011), the underpass at the end of the street is the space for other kinds of occult passage that we can't quite grasp.

Accumulating examples could be limitless: another way to think through this material is to point to directors that exploit corridic space. There are three auteurs of corridor spaces in film. Roman Polanski uses corridor distortion with Expressionist panache in *Repulsion* (1965), where Carol's madness expressed in a subjective hallucination of grasping hands pushing through the corridor walls of her apartment. *The Tenant* (1976) similarly uses distorted angles to rove the hallways of the Paris apartment block. Form becomes content in *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), since it is the mysterious blocked corridor in the apartment that holds the clue to the Satanic conspiracy among the tenants of the Dakota building.

David Lynch has continually used corridor spaces to evoke anticipatory fear, from the chiaroscuro of the hallways in *Eraserhead* (1976) to the Deep River

apartment block in *Blue Velvet* (1986), vestibules for Jeffrey's entry into adult sexuality. In *Twin Peaks* (1990-1 and 2017), domestic landings, hallways and corridors are transitional domestic spaces freighted with sexual trauma, while violent attacks often come in hotel hallways or institutional corridors. An unmotivated camera drifts through the empty school corridors just before Laura Palmer's death is announced in the pilot episode; the metaphysical spaces of the Red Room and the White or Black Lodge where she later resides are also continually divided up into curtained labyrinths traversed for occulted purpose. Turning the corner of a restrictive alleyway behind the diner in *Mulholland Dr.* (2001) reveals a vision so terrifying it kills a man. Lynch even carefully constructed the twisting corridor that leads to the humiliating marriage bed in *Lost Highway* (1997) in one of his own houses on Mulholland Drive. That corridor is a hallucinatory space traversed with mounting fear – at one point the camera itself seems to physically attack Fred there. Richard Martin, who notes Lynch's general obsession with 'the symbolic power of dark corridors, tight channels and claustrophobic spaces' suggests that in *Lost Highway* 'the corridor is a kind of portal, a transformative space into which Fred repeatedly disappears.'⁴⁴

Most influential, though, has been Stanley Kubrick's obsession with perfecting the camera's single point perspective, making the vanishing lines of the corridor one of his favoured cinematic spaces. The movement of Kubrick's camera, thrusting forwards and backwards to devour space, to master it with absolute technical precision, is his signature gesture, trialled in the linear tracks through rooms in *The Killing* (1956) and further extended in the glides through the

trenches in *Paths of Glory* (1957). The architectural volume of the corridor constitutes the path of the movement of the camera itself, the corridor and camera mirroring each other in exact symmetry. In horror film, it has been impossible to avoid the influence of how the corridors of the Overlook Hotel were shot in *The Shining* (1980). This was in part because it was one of the first films to use Garrett Brown's steadicam, and certainly the first to invert the device so that the camera prowls only an inch above the floor. Where Stephen King's novel was about verticality (basements, attics, staircases and haunted elevators), the film exploits the rigorous horizontality of the corridor, gliding effortlessly along the plane. Jean-Pierre Geuens suggests *The Shining* introduces a 'new scopic regime', the camera liberated from dollies and the hand-held shakes conventionalized as subjective point-of-view and instead produces a weightless, machinic gaze 'not necessarily of an entity' (as Garrett Brown himself puts it) 'but of something smoother and more eerie.'⁴⁵

Brown's choice of *eerie* to describe the evoked affect prompts the final stage of this argument. What kind of emotion is the space of the corridor meant to evoke? Is it always a space of suspense that builds towards the sublimity of terror, the measure of success for the first wave of the Gothic? Or does this space demand a more nuanced register to describe its affective economy, a quieter range of emotions that might include eeriness or dread?

Corridor Affects

Models for the emotional range of the Gothic tend to be limited. The touchstone is Radcliffe's simple opposition of expansive, cognitive terror versus contractive,

physiological horror.⁴⁶ But anything concerning domestic space often gets processed through Freud's discussion of the *Unheimlich* or uncanny, since this is parasitically coiled inside homeliness, the unfamiliar intrusion leading back to the most familiar. The *Unheimlich* is loaded with the doom of repetition, a space in which prior temporalities soak through and stall in traumatic repetition. This topography has become the default way not just to read the haunted house, but, in some formulations, every modern space.⁴⁷

Yet the affective range of the corridor is more focused on the bland, superficial modernity that carries no historical density and resists the temporal doubling required of the uncanny. Where Freud offers a psychology of depth, of vertical archaeological strata (his favoured metaphor for psychoanalysis), the horizontal plane of the corridor resists the striated metaphors that turn basements or attics into spaces. Instead, stepping into one of those infinitely extended modern hotel corridors, what is felt is not the melodrama of the horror-terror dyad, or some primordial return home, but a, quieter, more unsettling emotion.

In his last book *The Weird and the Eerie* Mark Fisher proposed that the eerie is a distinct category of unsettlement, quieter than horror histrionics and operating outside the ultimate reinscription into the home of the uncanny. An 'eerie calm' evokes 'something in the calm or the quiet that doesn't belong, or the quietness itself doesn't belong.'⁴⁸ The eerie implies an undisclosed extra agency, trembling on the edge of a revelation that need not connect to the supernatural at all but instead hints at the tested and broken limits of human agency. This is why Garrett Brown evokes the 'eerie' for the feeling associated with the corridor

shots in *The Shining*, or why it might describe the subjectless camera crawls through corridors in *Suspiria* that imply a malevolent machinic agency at work. But for Fisher the eerie is associated with uneasiness in the natural world, or more accurately disquiet at the end of any notion of uncontaminated Nature. It is the mood that portends the arrival of a 'dark ecology'.⁴⁹

A better concept for built space might therefore be *Angst*, that German word that is 'maddening' and 'tormenting' to so many of its translators, neither quite the concept of dread nor anxiety, but often translated as one or the other, or both, or just stubbornly left in untranslated italics.⁵⁰ The etymological root is *angere*, the Latin for constriction or squeezing, the shortness of breath that manifests a physiological panic, and which underlies the terms *anguish* or *anxiety*. Here is a useful etymological root for the claustrophobia induced by the modern corridor (*claustrophobia* itself being a term invented to account for anxiousness in the spaces of modernity).⁵¹

Søren Kierkegaard's distinction between fear and *Angst* argued that fear is generated by determinable objects on specific trajectories, whereas *Angst* is the underlying general predisposition from which these specific fears might emerge, a general anticipatory condition of waiting for something awful to happen. *Angst* is 'the reality of freedom as possibility anterior to possibility'.⁵² 'One may liken dread [*Angst*] to dizziness,' Kierkegaard explained, in a famous metaphor: 'He whose eye chances to look down into the yawning abyss becomes dizzy. But the reason for it is just as much his eye as it is the precipice. For suppose he had not looked down. Thus dread [*Angst*] is the dizziness of freedom ... [when] freedom

then gazes down into its own possibility.’⁵³ Fear comes from an already determined past, legacies doomed to return. Anxiety is tilted towards the undetermined, vertiginous future, producing potential threats with every choice made.

In the 1920s, Heidegger transposed this distinction directly into *Being and Time*, but without Kierkegaard’s agonized religious framing of original sin and the anticipation of God’s punishment. For Heidegger, fear is a lower affect produced by a ‘detrimental entity’ from ‘some definite region’ coming close, menacing Being, while *Angst* is the condition of Being-in-the-World as such.⁵⁴ ‘When something threatening brings itself close, anxiety [*Angst*] does not “see” any definite “here” or “yonder” from which it comes,’ Heidegger explained. ‘What threatens is *nowhere*. Anxiety [*Angst*] “does not know” what that in the face of which it is anxious is. “Nowhere”, however, does not signify nothing: this is where any region lies, and there too lies any disclosedness of the world for essentially spatial Being-in.’⁵⁵

To be is therefore to be *Angst-ridden*: the dread ‘so close that it is oppressive and stifles one’s breath, and yet it is nowhere.’⁵⁶ Using a slightly different conceptual frame, China Miéville, writer and theorist of weird fiction and cosmic horror, has formulated this dread (adding Marx and Bataille to the mix) as ‘the surplus value of fear: the accursed share of fear that cannot be reduced.’⁵⁷

Danny pedals through the corridors of the Overlook Hotel on his tricycle along routes that unfold continuously yet confound simple mapping. The corridors of

the Overlook suggest an ‘impossible and illogical structure’, that ‘converts the stable medium of architecture into a polymorphic language in motion.’⁵⁸ It is the *rooms* of the Overlook that contain the stubborn traces of the past, specific ‘detrimental entities’ that want to tempt the weak beyond the threshold. In the *corridors*, Kubrick’s use of the steadicam invents an unanchored, inhuman point of view – an eerie, veiled agency – that turns the corridor into a space of anticipatory *Angst*. Early reviewers like Pauline Kael complained that *The Shining* was not frightening because it did not understand the Gothic: ‘Who wants to see evil in daylight, through a wide-angle lens?’⁵⁹ Perhaps she was technically correct, but misunderstood the affect the film was reaching for. Kubrick certainly employs the Gothic machinery of the ‘old dark house’ in the conventionalized signs of haunting in the culminating scenes, but the first half of the film reaches after another kind of emotion. In the corridor, and in the choices Danny makes at every junction of the maze, his trajectories embody the dizziness of being angst-ridden. After the seamless loops of the Overlook’s labyrinth, the corridor becomes one of the privileged *genius loci* of contemporary cinematic dread.

This shift of affect can be precisely historicized. The late Victorian and Edwardian Gothic revival tends to focus on the domestic and the private, the hauntings or intrusions that disturb the differentiating functions of passageways in the private English gentleman’s house. The further we move into the twentieth century, this locus of the haunted house is joined by a new sensibility that begins to explore the dread engendered by public or institutional corridors, emblematic of what Adorno (after Weber) termed the administered world, the d(r)ead hand of ‘a fully developed bureaucratic mechanism.’⁶⁰

A convenient dating of this new affect comes from the moment when C. P. Snow coined the term 'corridors of power' in his novel *Homecoming* (1962). It was a phrase that immediately entered wider circulation, which Snow then used for the title of his next novel in 1964. 'The phrase has kept swimming before my eyes', Snow said, reaching the status of a dead metaphor even before he had published.⁶¹ This lifeless story moves between the sclerotic rooms of clubland, country house summits, and what are called Westminster's 'channels of "closed" politics – the corridors, the committees.'⁶² Snow's novel is symptomatic of a moment when this structure of bureaucracy leaps into a new kind of critical focus.

The corridor becomes a target of institutional critique in the 1960s. The vast public asylum system rapidly lost favour, coming to be seen as an oppressive structure that generated madness rather than cured it. In 1959, Russell Barton coined the term 'institutional neurosis', a disease characterized by apathy, lack of initiative, submissiveness, and loss of individuality that was experienced in large-scale bureaucratic systems.⁶³ In 1967, Mayer Spivack undertook a specific study of the psychological effects of a link tunnel at a hospital that was nearly three thousand feet long, recording feelings of profound sensory distortion and 'inexplicable feelings of uneasiness and discomfort': 'One feels victimized here. Something inexplicable is happening as one walks along, disoriented in space and time.'⁶⁴ This kind of architecture, once welcomed in utopian terms, was abandoned and left to ruin.

This critique accelerated through other public institutions, best represented by Erving Goffman's sociological work in *Asylums* (1961) or Michel Foucault's studies of the madhouse, the medical clinic, and the prison. Oppressive, uniform, bureaucratic governmentality was symbolized in the soulless science-fictional corridors of Jean-Luc Godard's *Alphaville* (1965), where a programmed populace shuffle like zombies under cybernetic command, an oppressive world of instrumental rationality.

The most overt critique of these institutions was conducted over public housing. Criticism of large-scale housing estates, built in the immediate post-war era, was well established by the mid-1960s. In 1965, the notorious Pruitt-Igoe estate in Saint Louis, meant to house fifteen thousand people along internal double-loaded corridors, open for only eleven years, was denounced as a disaster. The corridors of the Pruitt-Igoe had become gauntlets for harassment, drug-dealing and crime. The demolition of the estate began in 1972 and was completed in 1976: its destruction has been hailed as the punctual moment of the end of Modernism and the birth of Post-modernism.⁶⁵ Corridors became emblems of the open dangers of communal living, since landings and corridors could not provide what architectural theorist Oscar Newman called 'defensible space.'

In a high-rise, double-loaded corridor apartment tower, the only defensible space is the interior of the apartment itself; everything else is a 'no-man's-land', neither public nor private. The lobby, stairs, elevator, and corridors are open and accessible to everyone ...[and] they become a nether world of fear and crime.⁶⁶

This context of institutional critique allows new sensibilities to emerge in Gothic fiction and horror film. David Cronenberg's scientific institutes and housing blocks in his first films in the 1970s (*Crimes of the Future*, *Shivers* or *Rabid*) were antiseptic rational spaces where scientific experiment turns perverse. Bernard Rose's *Candyman* (1992) offered a rich and complex tale of racial violence set (and filmed) in the corridors and abandoned apartments of the notorious Cabrini-Green housing estate, a black high-rise ghetto in Chicago. In fiction, while haunted house conventions have not dwindled, the interstitial category of the 'weird fiction' presents eerie, unsettling stories of skewed institutional realities, gently unravelling instrumental rationality.⁶⁷ To the novels by Danielewski, Wiles and VanderMeer already mentioned could be added portraits of office-work rendered as absurd but increasingly menacing, as in Helen Phillips's *The Beautiful Bureaucrat* (2015), or the haunted corridors of the dilapidated, underfunded New York mental institution in Victor LaValle's *The Devil in Silver* (2012).

The corridor has long been something overlooked, a functional volume, a transitional infrastructural space to walk through to get somewhere else. Its insistent presence in the Gothic romance from the very beginning, to its changing associations in contemporary horror film and weird fiction, suggests this interstitial space can offer a secret history of modern affect. If you press your ear to the door, the dread void of the corridor beyond is whispering some significant stories about the transformations of our sensibilities across modernity.

NOTES

¹ Miguel Aguirre, *The Closed Space: Horror Literature and Western Symbolism* (Manchester, Manchester UP, 1990), p. 2.

² Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995).

³ Stephen King, *Danse Macabre* (London, Hodder, 1991).

⁴ Barry Curtis, *Dark Places: The Haunted House in Film* (London, Reaktion, 2008), p. 13.

⁵ Siegfried Kracauer, 'On Employment Agencies' in *The Mass Ornament*, trans. T. Levin (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 60.

⁶ Eino Railo, *The Haunted Castle: A Study of the Elements of English Romanticism* (London, Routledge, 1927), pp. 7 and 11.

⁷ Stephan Trüby et al., *Corridor* (Venice, Marsilio, 2014), p. 39. Kate Marshall, *Corridor: Media Architectures in American Fiction* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2013), p. xiii.

⁸ Robin Evans, 'Figures, Doors and Passages', in *Translations from Drawing to Building, and Other Essays* (London, Architectural Association, 1997), p. 70.

⁹ See Trüby et al., *Corridor* and Mark Jarzombek, 'Corridor Spaces', *Critical Inquiry* 36 (2010), 728-70.

¹⁰ Marc Angélil and Cary Siress, 'Infrastructure Takes Command: Coming out of the Background', Ilka and Andreas Ruby (eds), in *Infrastructure Space*, (Berlin, 2017), p. 14.

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- ¹¹ Samuel Tuke, *Description of the Retreat, An Institution Near York for Insane Persons of the Society of Friends* (York, Alexander, 1813).
- ¹² See Jeremy Taylor, *Hospital and Asylum Architecture in England, 1840-1914* (London, Mansell, 1991).
- ¹³ Fourier, *The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier: Selected Texts on Work, Love, and Passionate Attraction*, ed. J. Beecher and R. Bienvenu (Boston, Beacon, 1971), p. 243.
- ¹⁴ See Dolores Hayden, *Seven American Utopias: The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism 1780-1975* (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1976).
- ¹⁵ See Robin Evans, *The Fabrication of Virtue: English Prison Architecture 1750-1850* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982).
- ¹⁶ Nancy Tomes, *A Generous Confidence: Thomas Story Kirkbride and the Art of Asylum-Keeping, 1840-83* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1984).
- ¹⁷ See Jill Franklin, *The Gentleman's Country House and its Plan 1835-1914* (London, RKP, 1981)
- ¹⁸ Robert Kerr, *The English Gentleman's House; or, How to Plan English Residences, from the Parsonage to the Palace* (London, John Murray, 1864), pp. 75 and. 76.
- ¹⁹ Karen Chase and Michael Levenson, *The Spectacle of Intimacy: A Public Life for the Victorian Family* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 158.
- ²⁰ Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, trans. J. Sturrock (London, Penguin, 2008), p. 5.
- ²¹ Ann Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest*, ed. C. Chard (Oxford, Oxford World's Classics, 2009), pp. 21 and 108.
- ²² Radcliffe, *Romance*, p. 248.

²³ Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, ed. T. Castle (Oxford, Oxford World's Classics, 2008), p, 345.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 348.

²⁵ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, ed. A. Ehrenpreis (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1987), pp. 164 and 166.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 168 and 187.

²⁷ Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Fall of the House of Usher', *Selected Writings*, ed. G. R. Thompson (New York, Norton, 2004), p. 211.

²⁸ Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre*, ed. Q. Leavis (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1984), p. 237.

²⁹ See 'A Ghost Story', *Kentish Gazette* (15 September 1863).

³⁰ Henry James, *The New York Stories*, ed. C. Toibin (New York, New York Review of Books, 2006), 'The Jolly Corner', p. 467.

³¹, *Ibid.* p. 490.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 489.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 489, p. 490.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 495-6.

³⁵ See Elizabeth Stevenson, *The Crooked Corridor: A Study of Henry James* (London, Macmillan, 1961), citing a James letter to Mrs Humphry Ward from 1899, p. 142.

³⁶ Robert Aickman, 'The Unsettled Dust' in *The Unsettled Dust* (London, Faber, 2014) and 'The Hospice', in *Cold Hand in Mine* (London, Faber, 2008), p. 126.

³⁷ Mark Z. Danielewski, *The House of Leaves* (2000), p. 64.

³⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 24 and 60.

³⁹ Will Wiles, *The Way Inn* (London, 2015), pp. 25-6.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 95

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

⁴² Joshua Cameroff and Ong Ker-Shing, *Horror in Architecture* (San Francisco, ORO, 2013), p. 7.

⁴³ Thomas M. Sipos, *Horror Film Aesthetics: Creating the Visual Language of Fear* (Jefferson, McFarland, 2010), p. 107.

⁴⁴ Richard Martin, *The Architecture of David Lynch* (London, Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 181 and p. 49.

⁴⁵ Jean-Pierre Geuens, 'Visuality and Power: The Work of the Steadicam', *Film Quarterly* 47:2 (1993-4), 14. Garrett Brown quoted from interview with Danel Olson, in Olson (ed.), *Stanley Kubrick's The Shining: Studies in the Horror Film* (Lakewood, Colorado: Centipede Press, 2015), p. 569.

⁴⁶ See Ann Radcliffe, 'On the Supernatural in Poetry' (1826), reproduced in E. Clery and R. Miles (eds), *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook 1700-1820* (Manchester, Manchester UP, 2000), pp. 163-72.

⁴⁷ See Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester, Manchester UP, 2003), p. 24.

⁴⁸ Mark Fisher, 'Eerie Thanatos: Nigel Kneale and Dark Enlightenment' in S. Sandhu (ed.), *The Twilight Language of Nigel Kneale* (Brooklyn, Circadian Press, 2012), p. 110. See also his *The Weird and the Eerie* (London, Repeater Press, 2016).

⁴⁹ Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology: For A Logic of Coexistence* (New York, Columbia, 2016).

⁵⁰ Citations from the translator of Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Dread*, Walter Lourie, who suffered meta-*Angst*: 'I have acquired such a dread of these words, any of which may mean a dozen things', Translator's Preface to *The Concept of Dread* (Princeton, Princeton UP, 1944), p. viii. Another translation of the book in 1980 by Reidar Thomte renders it *The Concept of Anxiety*. There is a lengthy discussion of how to translate *Angst* in the *Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, which comes down on the side of 'anxiety' despite its 'remote connection with any of the uses of the German *Angst*', *Standard Edition*, III (London, Hogarth, 1962), p. 116.

⁵¹ See Anthony Vidler, *Warped Space: Art, Architecture and Anxiety in Modern Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 2001).

⁵² Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Dread*, p. 38.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁵⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (Oxford, Blackwell, 1967), p. 230.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

⁵⁷ China Miéville in interview, 'The Surplus Value of Fear', in Juha Van't Zelfde (ed.), *Dread: The Dizziness of Freedom* (Amsterdam, Valiz, 2013), p. 58.

⁵⁸ Kevin McLeod, 'Corridor Syntax', in Trüby et al, *Corridor*, p. 98.

⁵⁹ Pauline Kael, 'Devolution', *Taking It All In* (London, Marion Boyars, 1986), p. 2.

⁶⁰ Theodor Adorno, 'Culture and Administration', trans. W. Blomster, in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (London, Routledge, 1991), p. 95.

⁶¹ C. P. Snow, *Corridors of Power* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 196X), p. 7.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 220.

⁶³ Russell Barton, *Institutional Neurosis*, 2nd edn (Bristol, Wright, 1966).

⁶⁴ Mayer Spivack, 'Sensory Distortion in Tunnels and Corridors', *Hospital and Community Psychiatry* 18: 1 (1967), p. 18.

⁶⁵ See Charles Jencks, *Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (London, Academy, 1977). For history, see Katherine G. Bristol, 'The Pruitt-Igoe Myth', *Journal of Architectural Education* 44: 3 (1991), pp. 17-32.

⁶⁶ Oscar Newman, *Defensible Space: People and Design in the Violent City* (London, Architectural Press, 1972), p. 27.

⁶⁷ See Roger Luckhurst, 'Weird Fiction: A Dis/Orientation', *Textual Practice* 31: 6 (2017), pp. 1041-61.